DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 337 699 CE 059 461

AUTHOR Sheets, Robert G.; And Others
TITLE Building Public-Private Partnerships To Improve Vocational Education in Illinois.
INSTITUTION Northern Illinois Univ., De Kalb. Center for Governmental Studies.
SPONS AGENCY Illinois State Council on Vocational Education, Springfield.
PUB DATE Feb 91
NOTE 53p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Education; Academic Standards; Basic Skills; Career Counseling; Cooperative Education; Incentives; Job Skills; *Outcomes of Education; *Private Sector; Program Effectiveness; Public Sector; *School Business Relationship; Secondary Education; Student Certification; Teacher Certification; Teacher Education Programs; *Vocational Education; Work Experience; Work Experience Programs
IDENTIFIERS *Illinois; *Partnerships in Education

ABSTRACT

The Illinois Council on Vocational Education (ICoVE) launched a statewide study in 1990 to understand the perspectives of business and labor on what vocational education can do to prepare the work force with the skills necessary for the future. The study was designed to build new public-private partnerships. It included a survey of businesses and labor representatives, followed by eight roundtable discussions held across the state to obtain private sector input on two issues in vocational education: (1) What goals should the private sector and educators pursue in improvement efforts? and (2) What strategies should be used in building public-private partnerships in improvement efforts? The survey asked respondents (1,120 of 5,500 businesses and 26 of 50 labor representatives) for their degree of support for 18 goals organized under 6 areas: responsiveness to industry; basic skills; stronger academic skills; work-based learning; student certification and program performance; and teacher training and certification. Findings included the following: (1) applied basic skills have the top priority; (2) stronger requirements for advanced academic skills should be formulated; (3) teachers need current industry knowledge and work experience; (4) high standards and incentives for improvement should be established; (5) programs should be responsive to employment opportunities and skills standards; (6) career counseling should encourage students to explore options; and (7) the private sector's role in partnerships should be strengthened. (Seven recommendations and names and addresses of ICoVE committees supporting the project are listed.) (NLA)

ED337699

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ICOVE

Illinois Council on Vocational Education

Building Public-Private Partnerships to Improve Vocational Education in Illinois

Center for Governmental Studies
Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Illinois

CE059461

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

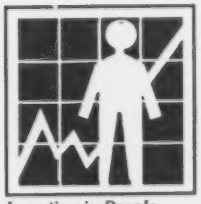
Building Public-Private Partnerships to Improve Vocational Education in Illinois

A Report Submitted to the Illinois Council on Vocational Education

Robert G. Sheets
Catherine Harned-Hall
Charles E. Trott

Center for Governmental Studies
Northern Illinois University
DeKalb, Illinois 60115

February 1991



Investing in People

Federal Vocational Education funds provided through P.L. 98-524, the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act of 1984, were used to conduct this project and publish this report under contract with the Illinois Council on Vocational Education. The positions expressed in this report do not necessarily represent in whole or in part the viewpoints of the Illinois Council on Vocational Education.

An Equal Opportunity Affirmative Action Employer. Printed by the authority of the State of Illinois, February 1991.

2

Members of the Illinois Council on Vocational Education

Robert M. Beckwith
Director
Small Business Programs
Illinois State Chamber of Commerce
10 N. Wacker Drive
Chicago, IL 60606

Hartzel L. Black
Dean
Correctional Education
Southeastern Illinois College
Vienna Correctional Center
Vienna, IL 62995

James E. Denny
Director
Organization for Human Resource Development
IMCERA Group, Inc.
2315 Sanders Road
Northbrook, IL 60062

Marie Malinauskas
Conference Coordinator
Division of Continuing Education
Washington Square C
Southern Illinois University
Carbondale, IL 62901

Ronald C. Moorehead
Illinois AFL-CIO Manpower Assistance Program
P.O. Box 3248
Bloomington, IL 61701

Percy Murdock
System Director
East St. Louis Regional Vocational System
3616 Trendley
East St. Louis, IL 62207

Joseph C. Piland
President
Highland Community College
Pearl City Road
Freeport, IL 61032

Carlos Y. Rivera
Manager
Human Resources
The Nutrasweet Company–Simpless Group
6200 Mulford Avenue
Niles, IL 60648

Gordon L. Ropp
State Representative
525 North East Street
Bloomington, IL 61701

Valee L. Salone
Executive Director
NIA–Comprehensive Center for Developmental Disabilities
155 West 75th Street
Chicago, IL 60620

Gerald W. Schmidt
Training Manager
Caterpillar, Inc.
P.O. Box 348
Aurora, IL 60507

Mary Beth Stine
System Director
Clay-Jasper-Richland-North Wayne Regional Vocational System
R.R. 2
Flora, IL 62839

Gerald M. Sullivan
Business Manager
Chicago Journeyman Plumbers Local #130
1340 W. Washington Blvd.
Chicago, IL 60607

ICoVE Staff

Peter Johnson
Executive Director

Carol Moellman
Assistant Executive Director

Contents

4 Introduction

6 A Profile of Survey Respondents

8 Applied Basic Skills—The Top Priority

11 Advanced Academic Skills: Stronger Requirements, More Options

13 Teacher Training and Certification: Ensure Current Knowledge of Industry and Current Work Experience

15 Student and Program Outcomes: Set High Standards and Provide Incentives for Steady Improvement

17 Improve Responsiveness to Employment Opportunities and Standards of Skill in Industry

19 Work-Based Learning Should Support Stronger Requirements for Academic and Technical Skills

20 Career Counseling: Too Little, Too Late with Strong Bias toward Four-Year Colleges

21 Public-Private Partnerships: Clarify the Role of the Private Sector and Make Better Use of Its Resources

23 Recommendations for Improving Vocational Education in Illinois

26 ICoVE Committees Supporting the Project

4

Introduction

Strong international competition, new technologies, and changes in workplace organization have substantially increased the skills required for almost all jobs. The issues are documented in a number of state and national studies.* The modern workplace needs employees with stronger basic skills as well as advanced academic and technical training. It is a matter of economic survival. Increasingly, businesses compete on the skills of their employees. In order to remain competitive, businesses throughout the United States have urged public education to upgrade standards in academic and vocational programs so that students will be prepared for the modern workplace. At the national, state, and local levels, the private sector has made a wide range of recommendations to improve education, including vocational education.

The improvement of vocational education programs in high schools and community colleges will require stronger working relationships between education and the private sector. These public-private partnerships must be built on mutual trust and common goals and strategies. Neither education nor the private sector can do it alone.

The Illinois Council on Vocational Education (ICoVE) launched a statewide study in January 1990 to understand the perspectives of Illinois business and labor on what vocational education can do to prepare the Illinois workforce with the skills necessary for the 1990s and beyond. The study was designed to help build new public-private partnerships. It included a survey of Illinois businesses and labor

*"*America's Choice: High Skills or Low Wages!*, Rochester, N.Y.: National Center on Education and the Economy, 1990; *Work Force 2000: Work and Workers for the 21st Century*, Indianapolis, Ind.: Hudson Institute, 1987; *Worker Training: Competing in the New International Economy*, Washington, D.C.: Office of Technology Assessment, 1990.

representatives followed by eight roundtable discussions held across the state to obtain private-sector input on two issues.

1. What goals should the private sector and educators pursue in efforts to improve vocational education in Illinois?
2. What strategies should be used in building public-private partnerships to improve vocational education?

The survey asked respondents to indicate their degree of support for 18 goals organized under six areas. These areas included: responsiveness to industry, basic skills, stronger academic skills, work-based learning, student certification and program performance, and teacher training and certification. The survey also asked respondents their degree of support for four strategies to improve public-private partnerships.

We sent the survey to a representative sample of approximately 5,500 Illinois businesses and 50 labor representatives. It was returned by 1,120 businesses and 26 labor representatives. About 90 respondents participated in eight roundtables held throughout Illinois (in the northwest Chicago area, downtown Chicago, the southwest Chicago area, Rockford, Peoria, Bloomington, Collinsville, and Mt. Vernon).

This report summarizes the major findings from both the survey and the roundtables. It concludes with recommendations based on input from private-sector participants and the project's advisory group.

6

A Profile of Survey Respondents

Table 1

Sample Sizes and Respondents by Industry

Industry	Percentage in Sample Size	Percentage of Respondents
Agriculture	0.64	1.23
Mining	0.58	0.47
Construction	5.60	4.15
Manufacturing	19.24	29.06
Transportation, Utilities Communications	5.12	7.08
Wholesale Trade	9.05	4.25
Retail Trade	21.44	14.25
Finance, Insurance, Real Estate	7.23	7.08
Business Services	4.91	4.25
Health	4.43	10.09
Other	21.67	18.11

To obtain business participants for the ICoVE survey, we drew a random sample of establishments from the Dun and Bradstreet files maintained by the Illinois Department of Commerce and Community Affairs. We sorted the businesses in the Dun and Bradstreet files according to their industry and employment size. The sample reflects the proportional share of each establishment size class in total Illinois employment. We adjusted the sample to ensure that the share of each industry was representative as well. Table 1 shows the distribution of each industry in the sample and the distribution of respondents for each industry. Table 2 shows the distributions for each establishment size.

The state office of the AFL-CIO selected the labor sample, mailed the survey, and collected and tabulated the results.* Some 50 labor representatives from across the state received the survey, and 26 completed the questionnaire.

The questionnaire used for the study was developed through active consultation. An ICoVE subcommittee charged with overseeing the study defined the goals of the survey, and an advisory group composed of nearly 50 representatives from the private sector and from trade associations provided guidance on major themes. Drawing heavily on major national reports such as *Workplace Basics: The Skills Employers Want*, a number of groups contributed to the actual questionnaire: the ICoVE oversight committee, ICoVE staff, and the Illinois State Board of Education (Department of Adult, Vocational, and Technical Education). The advisory committee provided reviews and comments. Ultimately, ICoVE approved the questionnaire for mailing. For a copy of the questionnaire, please contact the Center for Governmental Studies.

*We would like to express our appreciation to Richard Walsh, president of the Illinois AFL-CIO, who made the resources of his office available.

7

A Profile of Survey Respondents

We mailed the surveys in July 1990 and, with a second mailing, allowed about six weeks for participants to respond.* With adjustments for businesses that we could not locate, the response rate was around 20 percent. Establishments from manufacturing, transportation, and the health care industries were overrepresented in the responses, and establishments from wholesale and retail trade were underrepresented (see Table 1). Small establishments were underrepresented as well (see Table 2). Over 70 percent of the establishments in the sample had fewer than 50 employees, but slightly less than half of those that responded were from this group.

In the summaries that follow, we report responses to the specific items on the survey without adjusting for differences in response rates.

We examined the responses to all questions for each industry and for each size of establishment. We also compared the responses of participants from the Chicago metropolitan area (about 49 percent of the sample) and those from the rest of Illinois (about 51 percent). In no case did we find significant variations. The uniformity of responses combined with the strong overall response to the survey allow us to conclude with confidence that our results represent the opinion of Illinois businesses.

We held eight roundtables around the state in the last two weeks of September. The questionnaire asked respondents to indicate their interest in participating in a roundtable. Those who expressed interest received the results of the survey before the roundtable. Some 90 businesses and labor representatives joined in the roundtables, which were designed to allow participants to explain their responses to the survey and voice concerns as well as to introduce goals not covered by the questionnaire.

Table 2

Sample Sizes and Respondents by Establishment Size

Number of Employees	Percentage in Sample Size	Percentage of Respondents
10 - 19	40.46	24.72
20 - 49	30.19	25.09
50 - 99	10.38	13.07
100 - 249	8.61	14.30
250 - 499	5.96	9.75
500 - 999	2.90	6.72
Over 1000	1.49	6.34

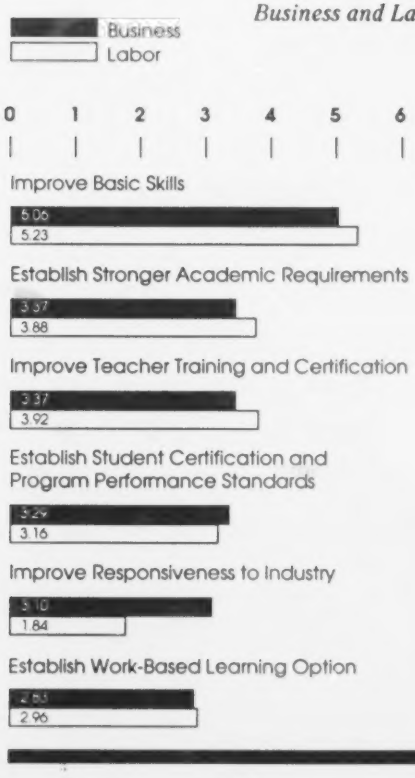
*We would like to express our appreciation to Lester Brann, president of the Illinois State Chamber of Commerce, who provided a cover letter for the business survey.

8

Applied Basic Skills The Top Priority

Figure 1

Average Ranking of Business and Labor for Major Goals



Throughout the 1980s, state and national studies highlighted the mismatch between the skills required in the modern workplace and the basic skills of new and existing workers. These studies clearly showed that workers need better skills to meet the new hiring standards of employers. Basic academic skills—reading, writing, and mathematics—are critical, but employers now consider additional skills as fundamental for workforce preparation. The American Society for Training and Development provides the most comprehensive definition of basic skills in *Workplace Basics: The Skills Employers Want.** Our survey used this and other studies to develop a broad definition of basic skills.

1. Basic academic skills, including reading, writing, and mathematics.
2. Communication skills, including listening and speaking.
3. Employment readiness skills, including attitudes toward work and knowledge of business operations.
4. Cognitive skills, including critical thinking, decision-making, and problem-solving.
5. Interpersonal skills, including group and teamwork skills.
6. Personal skills, including self-esteem, goal setting, and personal and career development.
7. Keyboarding and computer literacy skills.
8. Knowledge of technological systems (e.g., biotechnology, communications systems, physical technology).
9. Leadership skills and improving organizational effectiveness.

Talking about basic skills as a vocational education problem puts the problem in a wrong perspective; the problem with basic skills is an early elementary education problem."
TMA Roundtable

Basic Skills Must Be Top Priority

Illinois businesses and labor representatives said that improving students' preparation in basic academic skills should be the top priority for education. In the roundtable discussions, it became clear that participants made no distinction between education and vocational education. Rather, they saw meeting basic skills as the responsibility of all educational programs. About 73 percent of the businesses in our survey and fully 80 percent of the labor representatives ranked it first or second (Figure 1). Although respondents supported all other goals strongly, they consistently ranked them far below basic skills.

*Anthony P. Carnevale, Leila J. Gainer, and Ann S. Meltzer, *Workplace Basics: The Skills Employers Want* (Alexandria, Va.: American Society for Training and Development, 1988).

9

Applied Basic Skills The Top Priority

Basic Academic Skills– Reading, Writing, Math– Are Most Important

The results of our survey indicate that Illinois businesses and labor representatives support all of the nine areas of basic skills as necessary for the modern workplace (Figures 2 and 3). The nine areas fall into three tiers according to strength of support. By far the strongest support is for basic academic skills including reading, writing, and mathematics. Approximately 80 percent of businesses and 85 percent of labor representatives strongly supported improving basic academic skills. Other first-tier skills were communication and employment readiness skills. In the roundtables, employers emphasized the need to improve work attitudes and knowledge of basic work responsibilities. The second tier included cognitive skills, group and teamwork skills, and personal skills. The third tier included leadership skills, keyboarding and computer literacy, and knowledge of technological systems.

Make Sure Students Master Basic Academic Skills before They Enter Vocational Programs

Roundtable participants agreed strongly that basic academic skills must get top priority in all primary and secondary programs, but they should be the major responsibility of kindergarten through eighth grade. These skills are the foundation for all subsequent learning, and they are critical for success in secondary and postsecondary education as well as on the job. They should not be the primary responsibility of vocational education programs at the secondary and postsecondary levels.

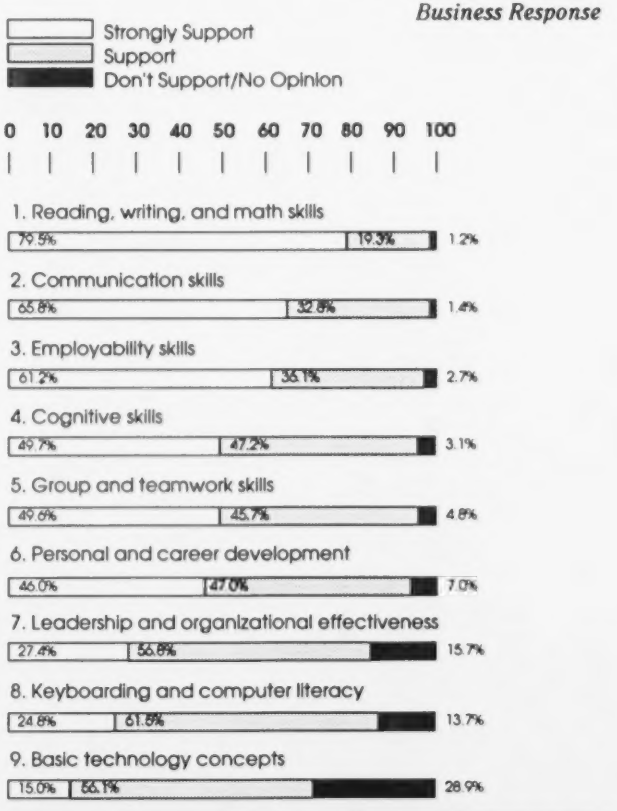
"As management flattens, decision-making goes lower and lower into a firm. Without communication (written and oral) and problem-solving skills, we're in trouble!"
MIMA Roundtable

Education Must Focus on the Application of Basic Academic Skills to Real Problems

Roundtable participants agreed that all students must be taught how to use basic academic skills to address real problems that are meaningful to them; however, they felt that few students were taught to do so. Participants commented that students need to learn through exposure to real workplace problems and that such applied learning should take place throughout a student's education. All educational programs must teach basic skills in ways that motivate students to learn how to learn and to develop cognitive skills. Students must be given the skills to read and

Figure 2

Improve Basic Skills Business Response

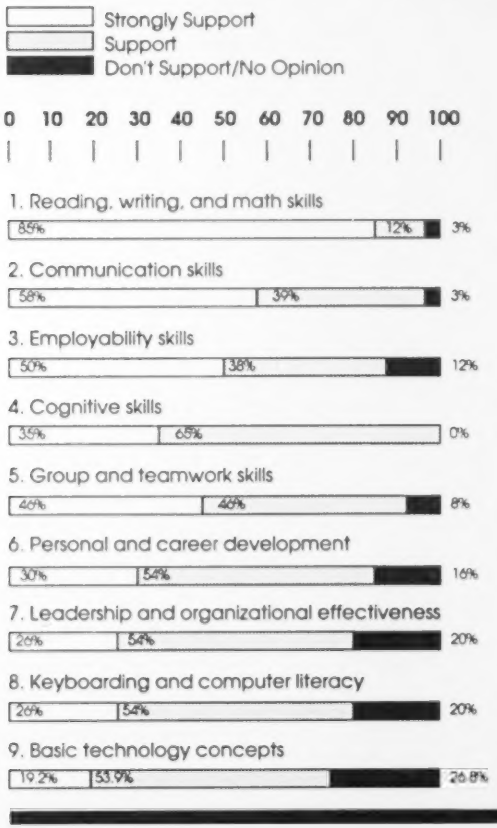


10

Applied Basic Skills The Top Priority

Figure 3

Improve Basic Skills: Labor



interpret prose, identify and use information found in documents, and apply numerical operations to solve problems and make decisions. Roundtable participants agreed that students now entering the workforce severely lack applied skills.

Vocational Programs Must Reinforce and Enhance Applied Basic Skills through Modern Workplace Problems

Roundtable participants from all industries throughout the state emphasized that the modern workplace requires employees to apply basic academic skills to identify and solve real problems. They agreed that students need a more comprehensive understanding of business management and operations in order to address problems in the modern workplace. Vocational education should provide students with problem-solving and decision-making skills as well as knowledge of business management and operations. The purpose is to enable students to apply basic academic skills to real workplace problems related to their vocational programs regardless of what those programs are.

Vocational programs should teach applied basic skills through instructional approaches that build communication, teamwork, group decision-making, and employment readiness skills. Computer training and knowledge of technological systems are important components of vocational programs. However, they should not be used to dress up programs that do not concentrate on teaching students how to apply basic academic skills.

Make Education Accountable for Basic Skills

Roundtable participants voiced a serious concern—that public education is *not* committed to providing all students with the basic academic skills they need to succeed in the modern workplace. Roundtable participants from all over the state expressed strong distrust that schools would be willing to change their priorities and concentrate on solving the basic skills problem. Most participants were frustrated because schools had not taken their concerns seriously in the past. They expressed strong disbelief that schools would listen in the future.

Roundtable participants agreed that the foundation of future public-private partnerships for improving education in Illinois is a strong accountability system in the area of basic academic skills. All educational programs should establish accountability systems for basic academic skills and especially for the application of basic skills in reading and mathematics, areas about which survey and roundtable participants expressed the strongest concern.

11

Advanced Academic Skills: Stronger Requirements, More Options

State and national studies demonstrate the growing importance of advanced academic skills in areas such as science and mathematics for almost all types of jobs in the modern workplace. These studies predict strong growth in professional and technical occupations that require postsecondary education.

New federal legislation in vocational education encourages states to implement Technical Preparation (Tech Prep) programs. Tech Prep integrates advanced academic and technical training in four-year programs that include two years in high school (with stronger academic requirements) and two years in community college. Some Tech Prep models add two years at a university.

Illinois is a national leader in implementing Tech Prep programs. Therefore, our study sought information about the support among business and labor for stronger academic requirements in high school and stronger links between secondary and postsecondary programs.

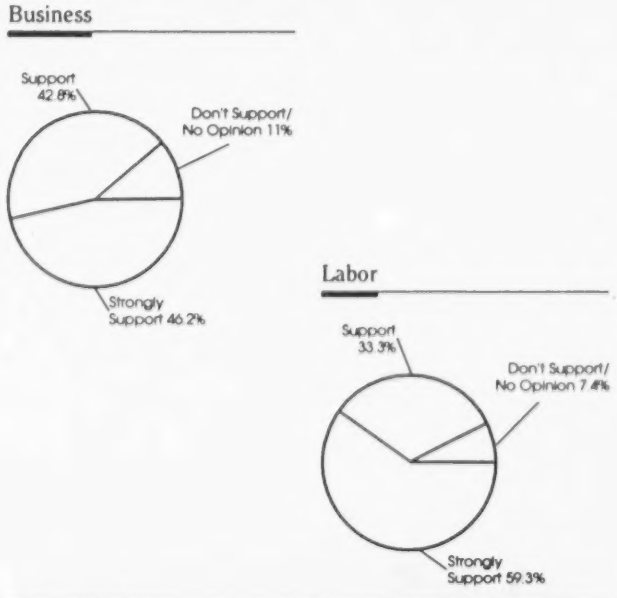
Requirements in Applied Academic Skills Should Be Increased in High School Vocational Programs

Businesses and labor representatives definitely agreed that students should meet strong academic requirements in order to graduate from high school vocational programs (Figure 4). Roundtable participants emphasized that almost all jobs in the modern workplace require advanced academic skills, especially in mathematics and science. Students need stronger academic skills whether they seek employment immediately after high school or they continue their education. Most participants believed that vocational programs should emphasize the applications of advanced academic education. Vocational programs should integrate advanced academic and technical training through workplace applications that reinforce and enhance problem-solving skills.

"We're asking our workers to do more than we used to. Now they have to manage their workstation, schedule their time, think about quality, problem solve, change to meet new requirements."
Rockford Roundtable

Figure 4

Vocational-technical education should require that students have strong academic skills (e.g., math and science) in order to graduate from high school vocational programs.

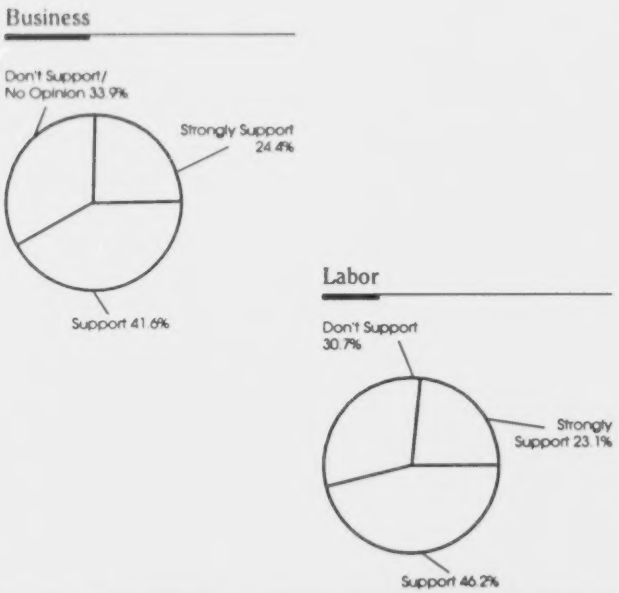


12

Advanced Academic Skills: Stronger Requirements, More Options

Figure 5

Vocational-technical education should require that high school students take the academic courses necessary to qualify for community college and university programs.



Businesses and labor representatives held a variety of views on the proper role of vocational education in preparing students to enter community colleges and universities. About two-thirds of both groups agreed that vocational programs should require students to take the academic courses they need to qualify for admission. However, over one-fourth did not agree (Figure 5).

Roundtable participants felt that some respondents disagreed because they feared that such requirements implied a greater emphasis on sending more students directly to four-year colleges and universities. Roundtable participants expressed strong concern that mandating vocational students to meet college entrance requirements would simply track more students into traditional college preparatory programs. Many participants stated that most high school students are encouraged to go directly to college without being given equally strong encouragement to consider other options such as community colleges, apprenticeship programs, or immediate employment.

"Good and promising careers exist that don't require a collegiate education. But these are not understood nor promoted throughout the K-12 program. The orientation to promote only college-bound students and programs is a travesty and creates a mind-set of failure for those students electing not to go to college for whatever reason."
Bloomington Roundtable

Roundtable participants agreed that high schools should establish stronger academic requirements to prepare students for all possible options, not just four-year colleges and universities. Tech Prep programs are one major option that students should be strongly encouraged to consider. Alternative paths to four-year degree programs should be established so that students who get training in apprenticeship programs or other types of industry training programs can work toward four-year degrees.

13

Teacher Training and Certification: Ensure Current Industry Knowledge and Work Experience

State and national studies highlight critical problems in recruiting and retaining qualified vocational teachers whose skills meet current industry standards and who have current industry work experience. States are exploring many different options to address the shortage of qualified vocational teachers, especially at the high school level.

About 61 percent of businesses and 45 percent of labor representatives strongly supported teacher training and certification based on standards of skill current in industry (Figure 6). Survey respondents also agreed that all vocational teachers should have current work experience related to their technical fields. About 43 percent of businesses and 44 percent of labor representatives strongly supported this requirement (Figure 7).

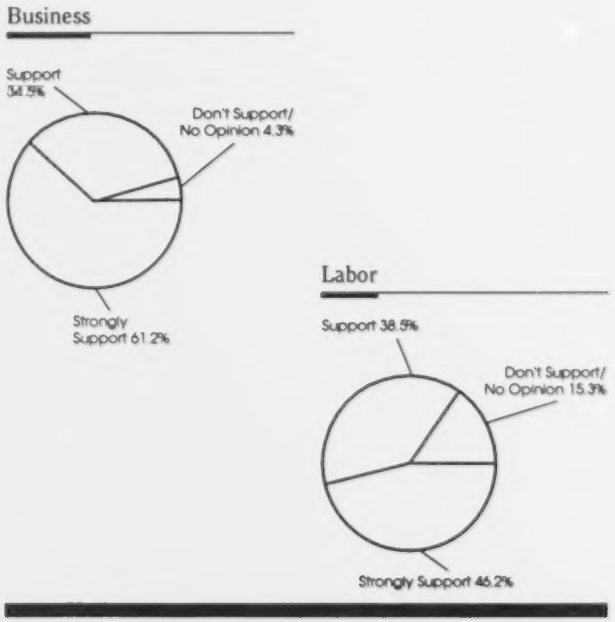
Change Certification Requirements for High School Vocational Teachers

Roundtable participants recognized the serious problems in finding qualified vocational teachers trained according to current industry standards. However, participants felt that positive steps could be taken to recruit qualified individuals from the private sector by changing the certification requirements for high school teachers. They felt that current requirements discouraged qualified people from the private sector to enter the teaching profession.

"The teacher who got certified repairing a 1939 automobile had better have gone to school since then if he is trying to teach kids how to repair a 1990 model."
Collinsville Roundtable

Figure 6

Vocational-technical education should require vocational teachers to be trained and certified according to current standards in the industry related to their teaching specialty.



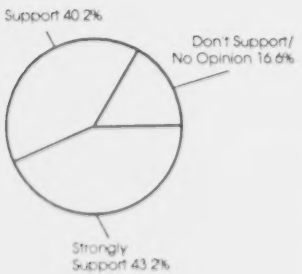
14

Teacher Training and Certification: Ensure Current Industry Knowledge and Work Experience

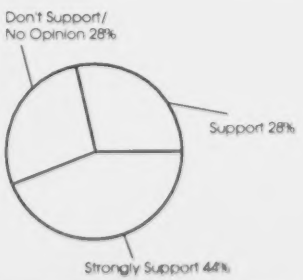
Figure 7

Vocational-technical education should require that all vocational teachers *have current industry work experience related to their technical fields.*

Business



Labor



Use Team Teachers to Bring Current Industry Experience into the Classroom

The roundtables focused on the need to bring current industry knowledge and work experience into the classroom. Participants felt that teachers must have up-to-date knowledge in order to present students with real workplace problems to which they can apply their academic and technical training. Most roundtable participants strongly supported programs such as the Vocational Instruction Practicum (VIP) program in Illinois, which allow teachers to spend time in private industry. Participants wanted these programs to expand so that more academic and vocational teachers could benefit from them. Roundtable participants also felt that vocational programs should use qualified people from the private sector to teach with certified vocational instructors. These team teachers could serve as role models and mentors for students. They could also set up classroom exercises in the workplace to demonstrate directly to students why their academic and technical training is necessary for employment. Most importantly, team teachers could bring real industry problems and applications into the vocational classroom.

Numerous state and national studies of private-sector perspectives on education call for greater accountability. They recommend that student certification in vocational programs should be based on demonstrated competence—not just school attendance, but what students know or can do. Some studies advocate that certification be based on standards of skill current in the industry that is the focus of the student's program. Such standards refer to the average levels of basic, academic, and vocational skills required for successful employment in the industry.

These studies also recommend that vocational programs be evaluated based on bottom-line results with their students. New federal legislation mandates states to establish performance standards systems that evaluate vocational programs based on student achievement in basic and advanced academic skills and one or more areas including vocational skills, program completion, post-secondary continuation, and job placement. States would be required to evaluate vocational programs relative to statewide standards that all programs would be expected to achieve.

"Performance standards are needed. But don't set them at the least common denominator. They need to reflect national or international competition. Companies in this room don't compete with other Illinois companies but with firms in Los Angeles, Japan, and Germany."

TMA Roundtable

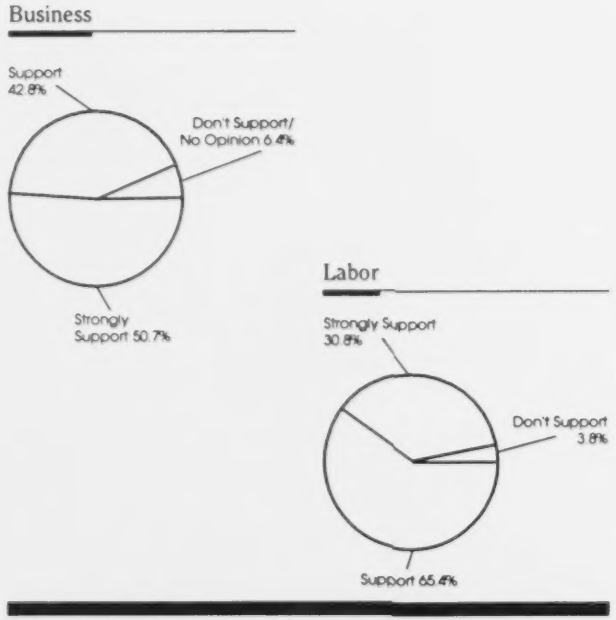
15

Student and Program Outcomes: Set High Standards and Provide Incentives for Steady Improvement

Businesses and labor representatives agreed that the focus of student certification and program evaluation should be outcomes. About 51 percent of businesses and 30 percent of labor representatives strongly support the view that students should be certified based on standards of skill current in industry (Figure 8). About 50 percent of businesses and 27 percent of labor representatives strongly support performance standards that would hold vocational education accountable for students' attainment of skills (Figure 9). Very few survey respondents did not at least support the focus on evaluating students and programs based on the skills students had achieved.

Figure 8

Vocational-technical education should certify that **students** *have achieved industry skill standards.*

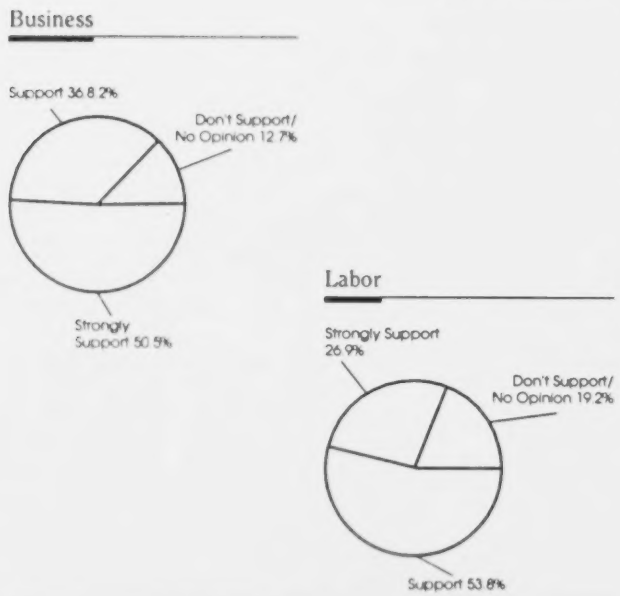


16

Student and Program Outcomes: Set High Standards and Provide Incentives for Steady Improvement

Figure 9

Vocational-technical education should establish performance standards which hold schools accountable for skills attainment.



Student Certification Based on Competence Must Be Credible and Reliable

Roundtable participants felt that new types of student certification based on competence would be very useful to employers if the certification process were credible and reliable. Most participants expressed strong distrust of any new type of student certification based on assessment and testing by the schools. Most participants were concerned that schools already pass students from grade to grade and give them high school diplomas when they lack even basic academic skills. Most suggested that public education would have to convince employers that any new certification process would actually demonstrate a student's competence.

Set High Standards for Vocational Programs and Encourage Steady Improvement

Roundtable participants generally supported the development of performance standards in vocational education programs. Most felt that the performance objectives addressed in new federal legislation provided a relatively balanced perspective on the bottom line in vocational education. Some participants suggested that additional information on teacher qualifications would provide a more complete picture of the quality of vocational education programs in Illinois.

Most participants were concerned that schools would set average performance goals or even use the lowest common denominator. They argued that performance standards systems should set high goals in order to make Illinois programs competitive within a national and international framework. Goals should be set with the understanding that most vocational programs do not perform at these standards currently but should be expected to reach them in the near future. Performance standards systems should not be punitive but should provide positive incentives for vocational programs to make steady progress toward high statewide goals.

State and national studies underscore private-sector views that vocational programs should match current employment opportunities and standards of skill in industries. Respondents to our survey agreed. About 61 percent of businesses and 50 percent of labor representatives strongly supported the goal that vocational education programs prepare students for current and projected job openings (Figure 10). About 54 percent of businesses expressed strong support for ensuring that all vocational programs be based on current standards of skill in industry. About 27 percent of labor representatives strongly supported this goal and 65 percent supported it (Figure 11).

Make Sure That Employment Opportunities Exist

Roundtable participants strongly supported the findings in the survey that vocational programs should be established and maintained where good job opportunities exist. Programs should be evaluated regularly based on how well they match labor market needs and the success of their students in getting jobs or continuing their training in the relevant occupation or industry.

Set State and National Standards in Core Skills But Allow for Flexibility to Meet Local Needs

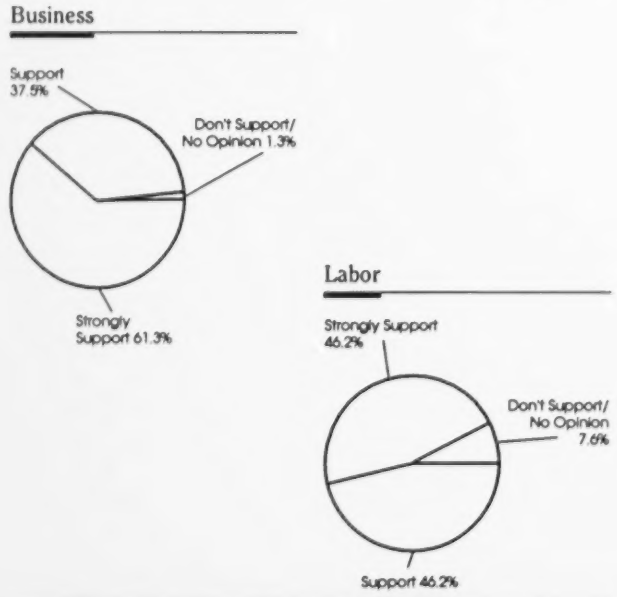
Roundtable participants recognized that industry groups need to establish clear standards for academic and technical skills taught in vocational programs. However, they were not sure how

17

Improve Responsiveness to Employment Opportunities and Skill Standards in Industries

Figure 10

Vocational-technical education should prepare students for occupations and industries with current and projected job openings.



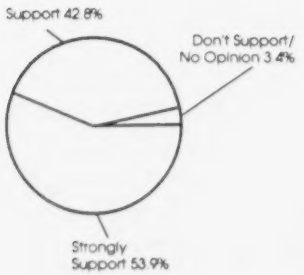
18

Improve Responsiveness to Employment Opportunities and Skill Standards in Industries

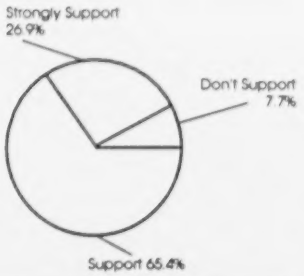
Figure 11

Vocational-technical education should ensure that all vocational programs are based on current industry skill standards.

Business



Labor



the private sector could come together on its own to set such standards. No clear consensus emerged on whether standards should be based on local, state, national, or international norms. Many participants felt that states should work with the private sector to develop national standards at or above international standards. Because many Illinois businesses must compete nationally and internationally, participants wanted to make sure that vocational programs prepare students to work in world-class businesses. Other participants recognized the need for state or national standards, but they wanted local programs to remain flexible enough to meet the needs of local industry. Most participants agreed that in core skill areas, state or national standards should be developed in consultation with industry groups. Local industry advisory groups should develop standards in the remaining skill areas.

"A hallmark of industrial training is verified results. These are proficiencies and competencies. We test for them. This should be done in education, too. This is quality control for education."
Collinsville Roundtable

19

Work-Based Learning Should Support Stronger Requirements for Academic and Technical Skills

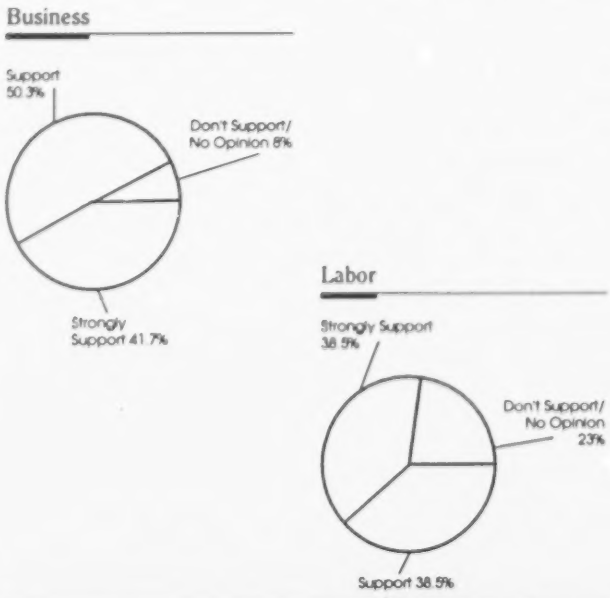
Many state and national studies urge federal and state governments to establish work-based learning systems similar to European apprenticeship programs. Other studies recommend that cooperative education programs be revitalized and expanded. Our survey asked respondents whether they supported a work-based learning option in high school to give students practical applications and experience on the job. About 42 percent of businesses and 39 percent of labor representatives strongly supported a work-based learning option (Figure 12).

Most roundtable participants felt that support was strong enough in Illinois to establish work-based learning in all vocational programs. They indicated that more businesses would be willing to create such opportunities for students if the state provided incentives and removed major barriers such as insurance problems. Most participants supported work-based learning as an instructional approach that could reinforce the application of academic and technical training to real workplace problems and develop employment readiness skills. However, participants supported work-based learning only if it did not interfere with students' mastery of academic and vocational skills. Work-based learning should be designed to support the development of such skills.

"Learning in a vacuum doesn't do a lot of good for an employer. You still have to train students and graduates in the basics. We definitely need a bridge between school learning and the needs of the workplace. We need some work-based learning, too."
Rockford Roundtable

Figure 12

Vocational-technical education should build a work-place experience option into high school programs so that students can learn through practical applications and on-the-job experience



20

Career Counseling: Too Little, Too Late with Strong Bias toward Four-Year Colleges

Our survey did not address career counseling, but it was a major issue in every roundtable throughout the state. It emerged in many different discussion topics, especially those that concerned the goals of increasing requirements in advanced academic skills and establishing stronger links between secondary and postsecondary programs.

Don't Use Vocational Education as a Dumping Ground

Most roundtable participants felt that schools used vocational education as a dumping ground for students without strong academic skills. They were concerned that vocational education had a negative, stigmatizing image for students and parents alike. They felt that most school counselors reinforce this image by steering students toward college prep courses and providing only limited information on the careers available through vocational programs in high schools and community colleges.

"Education's function is to prepare students for the workforce, not just for college. But high school counselors aren't knowledgeable of careers not requiring college. We need to educate counselors."
TMA Roundtable

Career Counseling Should Encourage Students to Explore Many Options

Roundtable participants agreed that most career counseling is biased and fragmented, and it normally comes too late for a student to make an informed choice to enroll in a vocational program in high school. Participants recommended that comprehensive career counseling be provided to all students before they enter high school. Counseling should present four-year degree programs as one option among many, including employment, community college programs, and apprenticeship programs.

State and national studies describe a variety of public-private partnerships set up to improve educational programs, including vocational programs. Our survey addressed four strategies for building partnerships: private-sector advisory groups, resource support for classroom instruction and career counseling, employer support for work-based learning, and support for teacher training in private industry.

Survey results showed strong support among businesses and labor representatives for all four strategies. Businesses gave their strongest support to the use of advisory groups to advise vocational programs on current skill standards for industry (Figure 13). Slightly more than one-third of the businesses gave strong support to the other three strategies as well. Labor representatives, on the other hand, gave their strongest endorsement to the support of classroom instruction, career counseling, and teacher training. One-fourth rejected the work-based learning strategy.

"I've served on school initiated private-sector advisory groups. They are a waste of tax payer dollars. All you do is get a tour, hear from an administrator and talk. But education doesn't listen. We just fulfill one of their requirements."
Mt. Vernon Roundtable

21

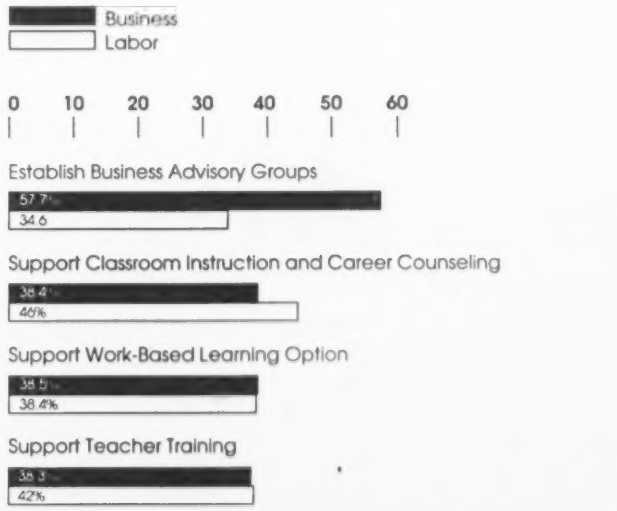
Public-Private Partnerships: Clarify the Role of the Private Sector and Make Better Use of Its Resources

Vocational Education Should Clarify the Role of Advisory Groups

Although private-sector advisory groups as a strategy received the strongest overall support from business and labor, most roundtable participants were frustrated about the way vocational programs use advisory groups. They felt that most programs use them merely as window dressing or to meet federal and state require-

Figure 13

Respondents expressing strong support for the strategic goals currently under consideration in Illinois.



22

Public-Private Partnerships: Clarify the Role of the Private Sector and Make Better Use of Its Resources

ments. Participants reported that private-sector representatives are asked to devote their time, but the groups rarely take their advice seriously or report on the results of their efforts. Vocational education should clarify the role of advisory groups, especially their decision-making authority, and give clear directives to schools on how they should use the groups in operating vocational programs.

Vocational Education Should Use Private-Sector Resources Better

Roundtable participants reported that few vocational programs request private-sector resources or use them effectively in their vocational programs. Resources include career information and speakers, company staff and equipment, off-campus training resources, and work-based learning opportunities. For example, most participants reported that when they contributed to career days at schools, few students were prepared to hear about career opportunities in their industries, and it was usually too late for them to make informed choices about vocational programs.

"Schools are too concerned over turf rather than their product. How can you build a meaningful partnership under these circumstances?"
Chicago Roundtable

Participants reported that many businesses would be willing to provide substantial resources to vocational programs if they were convinced that the programs would use the resources effectively. However, few participants believed that schools have comprehensive strategies to do so. Such strategies are crucial to building future public-private partnerships.

Our study addressed strategies to build public-private partnerships to improve vocational education in Illinois. Results disclosed a deep distrust of education within the private sector. Its major source was the strong belief that neither public education nor vocational education has made a genuine commitment to addressing the basic skills problem and to being accountable for results.

The First Step: Accountability in Basic Academic Skills

To build public-private partnerships in vocational education in Illinois, schools must make measurable progress in improving basic academic skills in reading and mathematics in all educational programs. Students should be taught how to apply these skills in solving real problems. Vocational education should make a major commitment to reinforcing and enhancing basic skills by teaching modern workplace applications. Vocational programs must make measurable progress in teaching students to integrate and apply reading and math skills. Improving basic skills, ensuring their application to the modern workplace, and making a commitment to accountability received the strongest response in both the survey and the roundtables. Reading and math are most frequently assessed in primary and secondary schools, businesses, apprenticeship programs, and other workforce preparation programs in Illinois.

"This roundtable is a very good idea; it's a productive way to brainstorm and get ideas for improving vocational education in Illinois. Now, if someone will just listen!"
Collinsville Roundtable

23

Recommendations for Improving Vocational Education in Illinois

24

Recommendations for Improving Vocational Education in Illinois

Strong partnerships between education and the private sector are most likely to emerge when schools report progress on this top priority of both business and labor in Illinois.

Recommendations

1. Illinois should establish statewide performance standards systems that evaluate *schools* based on their success in providing all students with basic academic skills, especially reading and mathematics, before they enter secon dary and postsecondary vocational programs. Illinois should establish the improvement of basic skills as its top goal and report annual progress in achieving it.

2. Illinois should establish statewide performance standards systems that evaluate *vocational programs* based on their success in reinforcing and enhancing basic reading and mathematics skills so that students can successfully apply these skills in modern workplaces related to their vocational programs. Illinois should establish this goal as its top priority and report annual progress in achieving it.

The Next Steps

Once the foundation for new public-private partnerships has been established, additional steps should be taken to improve vocational education based on the seven major goals addressed in our study. We found strong consensus among both business and labor on these goals.

Vocational education programs should explore many different strategies to bring current industry knowledge and work experience into the classroom. Existing programs such as the VIP program are effective ways to provide current industry experience to teachers and should be supported and expanded. However, two other strategies should be used.

Recommendations

3. Illinois should take steps to ensure that high school vocational education teachers remain current in their respective technical fields, especially with regard to the changes in technology and workplace organization occurring in business and industry.

4. Illinois should change certification requirements for high school vocational teachers to encourage qualified individuals from the private sector to become vocational instructors.

5. Illinois should encourage schools to use qualified individuals from the private sector as team teachers in vocational programs.

Vocational education programs will continue to suffer image problems and have difficulty attracting qualified students unless high schools make major changes in career counseling. Career counseling in most schools is focused on preparing students for admission to four-year colleges and universities. Most counselors provide only limited information to students and parents on career opportunities available through vocational education programs.

Recommendation

6. Illinois should initiate a comprehensive review of the counseling function in schools and develop new strategies to improve and expand career counseling to all students.

The private sector has a strong interest in the improvement of vocational education in Illinois. Businesses participating in the survey and the roundtables reported that most businesses would be willing to contribute their own time and resources in support of effective vocational education programs at the secondary and postsecondary levels. Illinois should take immediate steps to better organize private sector resources in support of vocational programs.

Recommendation

7. Illinois should organize statewide, industry-based consortia to coordinate private-sector partnerships with vocational education programs. The consortia should provide vocational programs with current and consistent information on the standards of skill current in industry and on business practices. They should also develop and disseminate current information about careers in their industries and operate career information programs for schools. Finally, the consortia should organize statewide efforts to promote work-based learning and provide resources for instructional support to vocational programs, including the recruitment of new instructors and team teachers from private industry.

25

Recommendations for Improving Vocational Education in Illinois

26

ICoVE Committees Supporting the Project

Business, Labor, and Education Steering Committee

Robert Beckwith, Chair
Director, Small Business Programs
Illinois State Chamber of Commerce
20 N. Wacker Drive
Chicago, IL 60606

Hartzel L. Black
Dean
Correctional Education
Southeastern Illinois College
Vienna Correctional Center
Vienna, IL 62995

Ronald Borelli*
President
CBM Computer Center
1622 Fourth St.
Peru, IL 61354

Marie Malinauskas
Conference Coordinator
Division of Continuing Education
Washington Square C
Southern Illinois University
Carbondale, IL 62901

Ina Minsky*
224 Cypress Creek Drive
Spartanburg, SC 29302

Ronald C. Morehead
Illinois AFL-CIO Manpower
Assistance Program
P.O. Box 3248
Bloomington, IL 61701

Gordon Ropp
State Representative
525 North East Street
Bloomington, IL 61701

Valee L. Salone
Executive Director
NIA-Comprehensive Center for
Developmental Disabilities
155 West 75th Street
Chicago, IL 60620

Gerald W. Schmidt
Training Manager
Caterpillar, Inc.
P.O. Box 348
Aurora, IL 60507

Gerald M. Sullivan
Business Manager
Chicago Journeymen Plumbers
Local #130
1340 W. Washington Blvd.
Chicago, IL 60607

Project Advisory Committee

Wilma Jean Alexander
Chair
Department of Business Education
Illinois State University
327 Williams Hall
Normal, IL 61761

Glenda Arnett
Business Agent
Illinois Garment Workers Union
314 N. Broadway, Suite 740
St. Louis, MO 63102

Mark H. Ayers
Business Manager
Local 34, IBEW
400 N.E. Jefferson
Peoria, IL 61603

Jerry Baginski
Director of Education
Tooling and Manufacturing
Association
1177 S. Dee Road
Park Ridge, IL 60068

Charles Baldwin
Director of Career Programs and
Career Education Services
Parkland College
2400 West Bradley
Champaign, IL 61821

David Billingsley
Rax Restaurant
North State Road
Flora, IL 62839

George Bock
Area Training Representative
U.S. Department of Labor, BAT
U.S. Post Office
600 E. Monroe Street, Room 102
Springfield, IL 62701

Bruce Braker
Executive Vice President
Tooling and Manufacturing
Association
1177 S. Dee Road
Park Ridge, IL 60068

Lynn T. Burger
Program Director of Occupational
and Adult Education
Illinois Community College Board
509 South Sixth Street, Room 400
Springfield, IL 62701

Patricia Cassady
Executive Director
Illinois Landscape Contractors
Association
2200 South Main, Suite 304
Lombard, IL 60148

*Former ICoVE members

27

ICoVE Committees Supporting the Project

Woody Colangelo
Illinois Legislative Director
United Steelworkers of America
950 W. 175th Street
Suite 2NW

Kristine Coryell
Director
Prairie State 2000 Authority
100 W. Randolph
Suite 4-800
Chicago, IL 60601

Dan Cosgrove
Illinois State AFL-CIO
100 East Washington
2nd Floor
Springfield, IL 62701

Gary W. Davis
Executive Director
Illinois Community College Trustees Association
509 South 6th Street, Suite 426
Springfield, IL 62701

William Dempsey
Business Agent
U.A. Plumbers and Pipefitters
Local Union #65
2335 West Mound Road
P.O. Box 2638
Decatur, IL 62526

John Drozdek
Carpenters Apprentice and Trainee Program
1256 Estes Avenue
Elk Gove Village, IL 60007

Jack Dyer
AFL-CIO Community Services Liaison
Springfield and Central Illinois Trades and Labor Council
United Way of Sangamon County
730 E. Vine, Room 114
Springfield, IL 62703

Mara Freimanles
Director of Education
Illinoi Hospital Association
1151 East Warrenville Rd.
Naperville, IL 60566

Nola Gramm
Illinois Farm Bureau
1701 Towanda Avenue
Bloomington, IL 61701

Mike Hade
Illinois Federation of Teachers
528 South 5th Street
Suite 210
Springfield, IL 62701

Sarah Hawker
Assistant Director of Academic Affairs
Illinois Board of Higher Education
500 Reisch Building
4 West Old Capitol Square
Springfield, IL 62701

Mary Rose Hennessy
Vice President
The Management Association of Illinois
2400 S. Downing
Westchester, IL 60154

Jacqueline Henning
Executive Director
Valley Industrial Association
2111 Plum
Aurora, IL 60506

Ron K. Hoffman
President
Illinois Agri-Business Council
700 Cypress Drive
Chatham, IL 62629

Gary Holland
President
Ajax Welding
Shawneetown, IL 62984

Jeff Isaacson
Apprentice Coordinator
1256 Estes Avenue
Elk Gove Village, IL 60007

Egon Jaeggin
Chief Executive Officer
Numerical Precisions Inc.
200 Foster Avenue
Wheeling, IL 60090

Denise Joehl
Associate Executive Director
Hotel-Motel Association of Illinois
4A Lawrence Square
Springfield, IL 62704

Philip A. John
Business Representative
IBT Local 743
300 S. Ashland
Chicago, IL 60607

Bud Johnston
Plan Review and Certifications Unit Supervisor
Illinois Department of Commerce and Community Affairs
620 East Adams Street (M-3)
Springfield, IL 62701

David Kins
Staff Representative
United Steelworkers of America
1400 Twentieth Street
Calvo Building
Granite City, IL 62040

28

ICoVE Committees Supporting the Project

Mary Ann Louderback
Director
Office of Planning
Office of the Governor
107 Stratton Office Building
Springfield, IL 62706

Edward D. Mayes
Past President/Executive Consultant
Merrill/Young
320 South Jefferson Street
Chicago, IL 60606

Charles McCann
Special Service Coordinator for Anna Jones HS
R.R. 4, Box 274A
Carbondale, IL 62901

Jess McCarty
Assistant to the Governor for Planning
Office of the Governor
107 Stratton Office Building
Springfield, IL 62706

Beverly Michalski
Vice President of Education
Marklund Children's Home
164 South Prairie
Bloomingdale, IL 60108

Richard Miguel
Assistant Superintendent
Department of Adult, Vocational, and Technical Education
Illinois State Board of Education
100 North First Street
Alzina Building, 4th Floor
Springfield, IL 62777

Joel W. Morris
Assistant Superintendent, Instruction
Maine Township High School District #207
1131 South Dee Road
Park Ridge, IL 60068

Lyle Neumann
Illinois State Board of Education
Henry Service Co.
101 N. East Street
Cambridge, IL 61238

Charles R. Norland
Superintendent
Sycamore #427
245 West Exchange Street
Sycamore, IL 60178

Donald Pennington
Superintendent
Danville School District 118
516 North Jackson Street
Danville, IL 61832

Tom Reid
Vice President
Education and Environmental Services
IMA
175 West Jackson Blvd., Suite 1321
Chicago, IL 60604

Tony Romolo
Administrator
Illinois Laborers' and Contractors' Training Program
R.R. #3
Mt. Sterling, IL 62353

Wayne Sampson
Executive Director
Illinois Association of School Boards
1209 South 5th Street
Springfield, IL 62703

Dennis Sienko
Prairie State 2000 Authority
State of Illinois Center
100 W. Randolph Street, Suite 4-800
Chicago, IL 60601

William Warnbier
Area Supervisor
United Steelworkers of America
502 Woodburn Avenue, Rooms 104 &105
Sterling, IL 61081

John Winzeler, Jr.
President
Winzeler Manufacturing
7355 W. Wilson
Chicago, IL 60656

Mary E. Wolf
Director
Career Development and Placement Services
Printing Industry of Illinois-Indiana Association
70 East Lake
Chicago, IL 60601

Jerry E. Wright
Manager
Technical Education and Training Division
Caterpillar, Inc.
100 North East Adams Street-AB4290
Peoria, IL 61629-4290

David Wyatt
AFGE, Local 914
U.S. DOL-BAT
1420 Miner Street
Des Plaines, IL 60016